CYPRESS-FAIRBANKS SCHOOL DISTRICT

RapidIdentity

Cypress-Fairbanks manages identities for over 100,000 students, plus parents, teachers and staff.

Located in the Greater Houston Metropolitan Area, Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District (ISD), has made it a top priority to remain at the forefront of leveraging technology and using it to provide a constant stream of information to staff, parents and students. As the third-largest school district in Texas with over 116,000 students on 92 campuses, that's no easy feat.

The Challenge

Beginning in 2006, Cypress-Fairbanks began making student progress information available to parents within the district via the Internet. The system in place did a good job doing what it was designed to do: providing secure access to parents who wanted to view their students' grades online. However, Cypress-Fairbanks had a larger vision of what they could do with a portal.

Cypress-Fairbanks had recently completed their identity management (IDM) implementation with RapidIdentity, the digital identity platform in education, to provide efficient and unified access to all users across all systems. So, they decided to reach out to the RapidIdentity team for insight on what could be placed out on the web, as well as how to support an expanded user-base. RapidIdentity formed the basis for a new cloud-based education portal.

The Solution

RapidIdentity is a private cloud environment that provides secure access to data that resides inside the client's network through the web portal and then out on to the Internet. Because the portal is in place acting as a brokering agent, there is zero penetration into the client's actual network, this is accomplished by placing a firewall on both the internet and internal network sides of the cloud.

The security is further enhanced by 128bit SSL encryption at all authentication points, denying potential intrusions into the cloud, and keeping the data stored on the network safe.

Users have access to cloud resources dependent on their role within the organization; these roles are defined during the provisioning and add tighter controls on information security. The provisioning of users can be linked to the directory service already in place to eliminate the possible need for duplicate identity stores.

Cypress-Fairbanks took the additional step of leveraging RapidIdentity to connect their parent portal into the newly implemented IDM system. The RapidIdentity team had already created a central data warehouse to link the authoritative systems, including the HRMS and Student Information System (SIS) to downstream applications. The parent portal was added to the system as a downstream resource, and then configured to the specification that Cypress-Fairbanks needed.

By tying the portal to the pre-existing identity management infrastructure, single sign-on functionality can truly be realized. Parents can now register themselves in the system, then be provisioned automatically. Another outstanding aspect of this system is its password reset functionality, which uses security questions to allow any user to reset their password without relying on IT.

The Results

RapidIdentity is not only a secure service, but it also provides a stable environment, with enough scalability to support up to 100,000 concurrent connections. Cypress-Fairbanks is the 10th-largest suburban school district in the nation, with over 128,000 students, faculty, and staff. The new portal supports parents who wish to participate as well, up to 250,000 additional users.

Cypress-Fairbanks is excited to have a portal that will get the job done now and in the future. Beyond robustness and reliability, RapidIdentity can host a vast array of applications and services, from email and productivity suites, to news feeds, announcements, and even JDBC and ODBC databases. RapidIdentity also serves as a single point to view and use web-hosted applications.

The district configured the system to allow parents to view grades, standardized test scores, Cypress-Fairbanks news, food and transportation information, demographic comparisons of their students versus the rest of the student body, and a digital report card. If parents opt to receive their child's report card digitally, a printed version will no longer be mailed, saving the district on materials, printing, and mailing costs.

Having the district's news available through the portal to all users ensures that everyone within the community has the opportunity to

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view the same information and is on the same page. Daily grade updates give parents the information they need to assist their students when they need help well before they have fallen behind. Attendance tracking, field trip participation, online assignment indexes, and a document library are examples of other services that can be configured by Cypress-Fairbanks IT. The online document library provides another opportunity for school districts to leverage the portal. Registration forms and trip release/participation forms can be centrally stored and accessed, saving time and significantly reducing paper consumption.

Self-registration and automatic provisioning of parents significantly reduces manual touch points required by IT staff to integrate users. Secure, automated password reset functionality allows a massive expansion in the services available to users, without burdening the help desk staff.

Furthermore, productivity is increased by providing all services from a central location, as users access multiple systems with a single login. Security is improved by quarantining remote access behind firewalls, ending the need for users to log into the actual network. This vastly reduces the number of open connections into the system, improving process load, and denying points of entry to unauthorized users. Cypress-Fairbanks' Education Portal, built on RapidIdentity and deployed months ahead of other vendors, provides a complete solution for next generation connectivity between parents, students, and teachers.